

CITY OF NEW YORK
THE SPECIAL COMMISSIONER OF INVESTIGATION
FOR THE NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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January 7, 2010

Hon. Joel I. Klein
Chancellor
New York City Public Schools
Department of Education
52 Chambers Street, Room 314
New York, NY 10007

Re: Amoye Neblett
SCI Case #2009-3438

Dear Chancellor Klein:

An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that Amoye Neblett, a principal assigned to the Adult Learning Program site ("the school") located in the Bronx, misappropriated a grand piano which had been donated to the school for the use of its staff and students.¹ Neblett had the piano removed from the school and delivered to his residence.

This investigation began in October 2009, when the Office of Special Investigations ("OSI") forwarded to the office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation ("SCI") e-mail communications which contained an allegation against Neblett. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] wrote that she had donated a grand piano to the Bronx Adult Learning Program in the care of Principal Neblett and made her intention clear that it was for the use of students and staff. According to [REDACTED] when she discovered that the piano was missing from the school, she questioned Neblett who said: "I took it home."

The documentation from OSI contained electronic correspondence between [REDACTED] and Neblett. In one message, dated October 1, 2009, [REDACTED] wrote that she considered Neblett's removal of the piano to be a theft, and demanded its return to the school within 48 hours, or legal action would be required. That same day Neblett replied:

I will deliver the piano to your home or wherever else you want but it cannot go to th [sic] school. The only reason it was removed was because

¹ Neblett was not reassigned as a result of this investigation.

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we cannot keep it there. Nothing was stolen from you and I appreciate you trying to resolve this in a civil manner

On Neblett's behalf, by e-mail message dated October 5, 2009, an attorney sent [REDACTED] a letter which referred to [REDACTED] delivery of the piano to Neblett as a "gift". The attorney asserted that, although not required to do so, at his own expense, Neblett would deliver the piano to any location in New York City, except to the school. The attorney also wrote that, if [REDACTED] instructions for delivery were not received within 72 hours, Neblett would consider the matter closed. [REDACTED] response was to contact OSI

SCI investigators met with [REDACTED] who said that, in July 2007, she had a conversation with Principal Neblett about donating a Weber Grand Piano to the students and staff at the school, to be used as an educational tool, under the care of Neblett. [REDACTED] added that she had a lock installed on the piano to ensure appropriate use and prevent abuse of it, and gave the key to Neblett. [REDACTED] reported that the piano was delivered to the school on August 2, 2007, and was placed on the third floor

[REDACTED] continued that she was present at the school on September 23, 2009, and noticed that the piano was missing from room 310. [REDACTED] confirmed that, when she asked Neblett where the piano was, he responded: "I took it home." According to [REDACTED], the piano was a donation to the school and was not a personal gift to Neblett for use at his home.

In an interview with investigators from this office, conducted in the presence of his union representative, Amoye Neblett confirmed that, in July of 2007, [REDACTED] asked whether he was interested in having a Weber Grand Piano donated to the school. Neblett maintained that he told [REDACTED] that he had no use for a piano in the school, but [REDACTED] countered that the students could use it. Neblett asserted that he asked [REDACTED] why she was donating the piano to the school and she responded that she had purchased a new piano.

Neblett acknowledged that, in July 2007, he accepted the donation of the grand piano from [REDACTED] and had it placed in room 310. Neblett also confirmed that the piano was locked and added that he and [REDACTED] had a key to it. Neblett said that he did not notify his immediate supervisor or anyone at the Department of Education ("DOE") about the donation of the grand piano.

According to Neblett, the students at the school rarely used the piano. Neblett continued that, in 2008, the GED Program at the school expanded and the piano was taking up the space needed for the program. Neblett claimed that he did not remember the name of the teacher from [REDACTED] who had donated the piano, but made one attempt to locate her. Neblett maintained that, in May of 2009, he had a conversation with an individual whom he knew only as "[REDACTED]" during which he asked about the

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identity of the teacher who donated the piano; however, [REDACTED] had no relevant information. Neblett admitted that, at the end of June 2009, he had the donated piano removed from the school in the Bronx and transported to his residence in Brooklyn.

In a subsequent e-mail message to his union representative, which was forwarded to the assigned SCI investigator, Neblett provided the name of the moving company he used to take the piano from the school to his residence and supplied the name [REDACTED] as the person with whom he had contact at the company. Neblett also informed his union representative that, although he had told the SCI investigators that he moved the donated piano in June 2009, it may have occurred during spring break in 2009, but he was not absolutely sure of that fact.

SCI investigators visited [REDACTED] Inc. located in Brooklyn, and spoke with [REDACTED] the owner. [REDACTED] confirmed that, in the spring of 2009, Neblett hired his company to remove a Weber Grand Piano from the school and deliver it to Neblett's residence in Brooklyn.

[REDACTED] informed the assigned SCI investigator that [REDACTED] was a teacher assigned to her site in the Bronx. [REDACTED] site in the Bronx was at the same location as the Bronx site of the Adult Learning Program.

SCI investigators spoke with [REDACTED] who did not recall having a conversation with Neblett, in May 2009, about the identity of the donor of the grand piano.

It is the recommendation of this office that Amoye Neblett's employment be terminated, that he be made ineligible for work with the DOE, and that this matter be considered should he apply for any position in the New York City school system in the future.

We note that the conduct described here may violate the conflicts of interest provisions of the New York City Charter which is administered by the New York City Conflicts of Interest Board.

[REDACTED]

We are forwarding a copy of this letter and of our report concerning this investigation to the Office of Legal Services. We also are sending our findings to the State Education Department for whatever action it deems appropriate. Should you have any inquiries regarding the above, please contact First Deputy Commissioner Regina Loughran, the attorney assigned to the case. She can be reached at (212) 510 1426.

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Please notify First Deputy Commissioner Loughran within 30 days of receipt of this letter of what, if any, action has been taken or is contemplated regarding Amoye Neblett.
Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

RICHARD J. CONDON
Special Commissioner
of Investigation for the
New York City School District

By:


Regina A. Loughran
First Deputy Commissioner

RJC:RAL:lm

c: Michael Best, Esq.
Theresa Europe, Esq.